

Obama Approval Ratings Rise Amidst Scandals

Written by Hazel Trice Edney
Wednesday, 22 May 2013 00:00

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The 2013 Morehouse College Commencement theme, “Keeping Our Focus,” defined by the university’s President John Wilson as attending to important matters “to the exclusion of distractions” appears to also describe the strategy employed by its graduation speaker – President Barack Obama.

With Washington scandals raging in the background, Obama focused keenly on the crucial challenges of the economy and jobs in America. In Sunday’s speech, he told the graduates at the Atlanta-based university that his job is to push for domestic policies that will make life better for them and everyone else.

“There’re places where jobs are still too scarce and wages are still too low; where schools are underfunded and violence is pervasive; where too many of our men spend their youth not behind a desk in a classroom, but hanging out on the streets or brooding behind a jail cell,” he told the class of all males.

He continued, “My job, as President, is to advocate for policies that generate more opportunity for everybody - policies that strengthen the middle class and give more people the chance to climb their way into the middle class; policies that create more good jobs and reduce poverty, and educate more children, and give more families the security of health care, and protect more of our children from the horrors of gun violence. That’s my job. Those are matters of public policy, and it is important for all of us - black, white and brown - to advocate for an America where everybody has got a fair shot in life. Not just some. Not just a few,” he said to rousing applause.

Those applause appear to reflect rising approval of the way the President is doing his job. A

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CNN/Opinion Research Corporation International survey, conducted over the weekend, showed his job performance disapproval at 45 percent, but performance approval at 53 percent, rising from 51 percent just last month. The poll was in sync with a Gallop poll conducted about the same time, which also showed rising approval for the way the President is handling his job.

In his fifth year, President Obama is facing the biggest scandals of his administration, drawing wide spread scrutiny and Congressional hearings. Those controversies include the targeting by the Internal Revenue Service of Tea Party and other conservative groups as they applied for tax exempt status; continuing questions about how the Obama administration handled the September 11, 2012 attack in Benghazi, Libya, that killed a U.S ambassador and three other Americans; and - most recently - scrutiny over the secret collection of Associated Press phone records as part of a government probe into leaks of classified information.

The President has not ignored the scandals, but he appears to be keeping his distance and only addressing the issues as necessary while allowing investigating agencies, including Congressional committees, to do their jobs. Though the IRS and Associate Press controversies appear to have drawn bipartisan outrage, Republican law makers and pundits made rounds on Sunday talk shows with specific criticism of the Obama Administration.

Meanwhile, at Morehouse's rainy graduation, his second spring commencement address after Ohio State earlier this month, the President appeared to enjoy a love fest of support in a comfortable home base of African-Americans at the alma mater of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He welcomed the opportunity to hit home his domestic policy agenda and encourage the graduates to change their communities for the better.

"I love you!" a voice rose from the audience as the President settled at the podium.

"I love you back. That's why I'm here," he responded.

He continued in a light moment, drawing laughter from the audience: "I see some moms and grandmas here, aunts, in their Sunday best - although they are upset about their hair getting messed up. Michelle would not be sitting in the rain. She has taught me about hair."

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He concluded, "It will not be sufficient for Morehouse College, for any college, for that matter, to produce clever graduates... but rather honest men, men who can be trusted in public and private life - men who are sensitive to the wrongs, the sufferings, and the injustices of society and who are willing to accept responsibility for correcting [those] ills."

He named great men who graduated from Morehouse and went on to become powerful and impactful leaders. Most are household names including Dr. King, abolitionist Frederick Douglass, entrepreneurial leader and educator Booker T. Washington, political scientist Ralph Bunche, writer Langston Hughes, inventor George Washington Carver, civil rights icon Ralph Abernathy, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson and film maker Spike Lee.

"These men were many things to many people. And they knew full well the role that racism played in their lives. But when it came to their own accomplishments and sense of purpose, they had no time for excuses," the President said. "That's what we've come to expect from you, Morehouse - a legacy of leaders - not just in our Black community, but for the entire American community. "